

APPEARED

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Libyans staking out US targets, officials say

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WASHINGTON - Libyan agents over the last few weeks have engaged in a large-scale, worldwide effort to identify American targets for possible terrorist attacks, well-placed administration sources revealed yesterday.

The activity, the sources said, have not only involved active surveillance of US embassies and military posts, but also airports heavily traveled by American businessmen and tourists and even post office boxes used by Americans abroad.

The effort, they said, has not been confined to the Mideast, but has also included North Africa, the Mediterranean, Western Europe, the Caribbean and East Asia.

Sources said the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been put

on alert, but that few reports of unusual Libyan activity have turned up in the United States.

Some ranking officials conjecture that the unusual activity abroad may constitute a contingency plan related to a three-carrier US naval task force that started an exercise off the coast of Libya last night. [Page 14.]

In recent months Col. Moammar Khadafy, the Libyan leader, has repeatedly threatened to carry terrorism to the United States if the United States takes action against him.

It has been widely reported that US planes and ships will cross into the Gulf of Sidra, which Khadafy claims as territorial water but which all other maritime nations say is international.

Some officials think Khadafy may want to be prepared to mount a retaliatory campaign of terror against Americans abroad if the naval exercise should result in a shooting incident or escalate into US air and naval strikes against Libyan territory.

The United States has alerted several friendly governments to request their assistance in increasing surveillance of the Lib-

vans and in providing heightened security at US installations and at foreign airports, sources said.

In addition, certain specialized American military units have been put on alert in case they are needed to preempt an attack or to help repel it.

Specialized units on alert

One official said there always has been a certain amount of Libyan activity near US facilities overseas, but that "it has been much more active and widespread in the last few weeks. We're picking up a lot of reports from our posts around the world."

President Reagan first ordered 6th Fleet maneuvers off the Libyan coast following terrorist attacks in late December at the Rome and Vienna airports in which several American travellers were killed and wounded.

The United States alleged Libyan support of the Abu Nidal terrorist group that was blamed for the two attacks, and unsuccessfully sought European support for economic sanctions against the Libyan regime.

There were major fleet exercises off Libya in January and February but in neither case did planes or ships cross 32 degrees 30 minutes north latitude into the mouth of the Gulf of Sidra. Khadafy has labeled that the so-called "line of death."

240 aircraft, 40 ships

With the recent arrival of a third carrier and its escorts, the United States decided to enter the gulf, sources say. The total force includes about 240 combat aircraft and about 40 ships.

Officials insist there is no intent to goad Khadafy into a military response - as in August of 1981 when he sent two of his jet

fighters out after some US aircraft, only to see the Libyan planes shot down.

However, it is understood that some officials, particularly in the White House, the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, would not be unhappy if Khadafy took military action against the fleet, opening the way to potentially heavy American retaliation. Pentagon officials and officers have consistently advised against a military operation against Libya.

In little-noticed testimony late last month before the House Judiciary Committee, Robert Oakley, the State Department's principal counter-terrorism planner, said: "We have begun a new, more assertive phase in combatting the state supporters of terrorism, exemplified by the president's decision to sever all economic as well as political contacts with Libya, to persuade other governments to join us and to retain the option of more forceful unilateral action should this cooperative campaign fail to stop Khadafy."

Oakley said the "main conclusion" of a six-month study of terrorism by a task force headed by Vice President George Bush was that the United States "will not be deterred by the risk of retaliation in this country" in stepping up its campaign against state-supported terrorism.